ASPCA
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TESTIMONY ON MICHIGAN SB 285/286
Presented by Vicki Deisner, Midwest Legislative Director
Before the Michigan Senate Judiciary Committee
Tuesday, April 16, 2013

Chairman Jones, Majority Vice-Chairman Schuitmaker, Minority Committee Chair Bieda and distinguished members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, I am Vicki Deisner, the Midwest Legislative Director for the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA). The ASPCA, founded in 1866, is the first humane organization established in the Americas and serves as the nation's leading voice for animal welfare. The ASPCA's mission is to provide effective means for the prevention of cruelty to animals throughout the United States. As part of our national effort to assist local anti-cruelty efforts on the ground, the ASPCA provides grants to local communities. In fact, over the last several years we have awarded over $600,000 to communities throughout Michigan. On behalf of our approximately 2.5 million members and supporters, including over 60,000 Michigan citizens, we respectfully urge the Senate Judiciary Committee to support SB 285/286 – a bill that would increase penalties for deliberate animal cruelty.

Michigan's animal cruelty statute (MCL 750.50 and 750.50b) includes severe penalties for deliberate or inadvertent cruelty, neglect, or abandonment, and for deliberately torturing, mutilating, maiming, or disfiguring animals. However, recent cases involving deliberate cruelty to specific kinds of animals, the hoarding and neglect of large numbers of animals in breeding facilities and pet stores, and the threatening or retaliatory abuse of animals in domestic situations have revealed the need for increase penalties to address these types of crime.

The passage of S 285/286 will help to end the deplorable cruelty witnessed by local authorities in Michigan. Key components of this bill that the ASPCA supports are:

1) Including breeders and owners of pet shops within the category of perpetrators,
2) Increasing the penalties for acts of cruelty to more than 25 animals,
3) Increasing the penalties for those who knowingly harm a companion animal,
4) Creating a felony charge for individuals who have had three or more prior convictions, and
5) Adding penalties for crimes that cause serious psychological injury to the owner of a companion animal.

The ASPCA strongly supports the passing of S 285/286 to address the growing trend of deliberate animal cruelty in Michigan including

Deliberate Cruelty to Companion Animals. Research has shown consistent patterns of animal cruelty among perpetrators of other forms of violence – including child abuse, spousal abuse, and elder abuse. Researchers have found that in families under supervision for physical abuse of their children, pet abuse was concurrent in 88% of the families. By increasing penalties in cases involving deliberate cruelty to companion animals, law enforcement can better target and isolate those who pose a danger to society.

Repeated Animal Cruelty Violations by Pet Shops. Last year, more than a hundred animals – including dogs, birds, guinea pigs, hamsters, frogs, snakes, lizards, chinchillas, and mice – were seized from deplorable conditions in a Dearborn Heights pet store. However, Michigan's current 'Pet Shops, Dog Pounds, and Animal Shelters' law has only misdemeanor penalties for such neglect and does not address repeat offenders. This would change with S 285 which would create specific penalties of imprisonment up to two years and fines of up to $5,000 for those who have been convicted for five or more violations.

For all of these reasons, the ASPCA respectfully urges this committee to support SB 285/286. Thank you for your time and consideration.